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ABSTRACT

Three programs using the Educational Development Center's "Exploring Childhood" curriculum package are discussed in the light of the experiences of home economics and social studies teachers field testing the materials. Designed to provide adolescents with a theoretical and practical look at early childhood, these materials integrate classroom study of child development with field experience in a preschool center. The curriculum used in the classroom teaching helps students acquire the necessary knowledge and awareness to make their field experience meaningful. Three modules used in the curriculum are "Working with Children" which teaches the techniques for working with and understanding children; "Seeing Development" which deals with aspects of child maturation; and "Family and Society" which explores the sociological factors in a child's life. Case studies of individual children are also conducted and written up in report form. Adolescents are enthusiastic about their first hand experience with young children and believe that it is a true life preparation experience. (Author/JR)

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Learning for Living:

Adolescents in Preschool

"I used to think all little kids were alike--boring! Now I realize they're really interesting people with different personalities. I've also learned these little jokers can really pull the fast ones on you if you don't watch them. They sure keep you on your toes."

This was the observation of a high school junior just finishing a course called *Exploring Childhood*. The course combined the classroom study of child development with field experience in a preschool center. Among the topics studied in the year-long course were theories of child development, aspects of family relationships, techniques for working with children, and career opportunities in child-care services. Field experience in the preschool centers included interacting with individual children as well as working with groups of youngsters.

Across the country there is a growing number of programs designed to provide adolescents with a theoretical and practical look at early childhood. In the 1973-74 school year, some 220 such programs were involved in a field test of the *Exploring Childhood* curriculum package, a product of the Education Development Center (EDC). To show the diversity and scope of *Exploring Childhood* programs, this *Profile of Promise* will describe three courses which were part of the EDC field test.

One *Exploring Childhood* program was at Iver C. Ranum High School in Westminster, Colorado. The class of sophomore, junior, and senior girls was directed by Jean Eastin, a home economics teacher. The second program, at Bear Creek High School, Jefferson County, Colorado, was also taught by a home economics teacher, Lorraine Adolphson. The Bear Creek participants were mostly girls but did include two boys who took the course as independent study. In both the Ranum and Bear Creek programs, the adolescents worked with children in preschool centers.

The third program has several unusual aspects. It was directed by a male social studies teacher, Roger Pugh. The students were ninth graders, ten boys and ten girls, from Ft. Benton, Montana. These students worked with kindergarten through third-grade children rather than preschoolers.

EXPLORING CHILDHOOD IN THE CLASSROOM

The three *Exploring Childhood* teachers all stress the importance of integrating classroom learning and field experience. The curriculum they used in their classroom teaching was designed to help students acquire the necessary knowledge and awareness to make their field experience meaningful.

The materials used in the program are organized into three learning modules. The first module, "Working with Children," concerns direct interaction with young children. Students are taught the kinds of characteristics and signs to observe in children; they learn to look for likenesses and differences among youngsters. Adolescents are also taught techniques for working with children--how to share experiences with youngsters as well as how to direct them in activities.

The second module, "Seeing Development," deals with aspects of child maturation. Students are introduced to various theories of child growth and development; the changes in a child's needs and behavior are examined from infancy through childhood.

The third module, "Family and Society," focuses on the family and society. In this module students explore the sociological factors in a child's early life--the influence of his family and the impact of persons and experiences outside his home.

Adolphson, Pugh, and Eastin all use a variety of resources and activities in their classrooms. The program materials include films, booklets, posters, and various activity products; but the teachers have supplemented the publisher's materials with their own resource books, guest speakers, and field trips.

Considerable emphasis is placed on class discussion of the observations made by students in their field experiences. Relating their practical experiences to their classroom learning helps students develop more insight into child development. Pugh emphasizes this integration of experience by requiring students to keep daily journals of what they do, both in the classroom and in their field placement. Reading the students' journals helps the teacher learn what concepts the students are developing.

The three teachers each report an unanticipated result of the course. It seems that, as their adolescent students studied aspects of childhood, they began to apply what they learned to themselves. They came to see their own personalities and characteristics in a new light. They also developed fresh insights into their family situations and their society. Describing this experience one young man said, "(this course) kinda makes me think about when I was little and makes me try to find out why I am the way I am."

EXPLORING CHILDHOOD IN THE FIELD

The Ft. Benton, Bear Creek, and Ranum *Exploring Childhood* programs are much alike in their classwork curriculums, but there is considerable variation in their field placements. It is the responsibility of every *Exploring Childhood* teacher to arrange field sites, and each of the three teachers in these programs approached the task differently.

There were no preschool centers in Ft. Benton, so Pugh arranged to have his students work in public school kindergarten and first grade classes the first semester; later they worked with second and third grades also. Although his students were observing slightly older youngsters, their experiences were similar to those of the Bear Creek and Ranum students who worked in preschool centers.

Adolphson's choice of field sites were three preschool centers which are part of the Jefferson County school system; the centers serve children ages three to five. She chose the schools because she found the physical facilities appropriate and because the congenial staffs at the centers were interested in having the adolescents in their programs.

To accommodate the various individual transportation and time problems of her students, Eastin placed students in three different types of preschool centers, one a headstart program and the other two private day care centers. She also arranged for her students to work with different groups of youngsters during the year so the students could have experience with children of various ages.

Based on their experience in choosing field placements, the *Exploring Childhood* teachers believe four considerations are particularly important in selecting a field site. First, the preschool staff must understand that the adolescents are not there in a custodial care role; students may help with physical care duties and cleaning up, but these should not be their only function. Second, the staff must be willing to let the adolescents interact with the youngsters, not just be observers.

Third, the preschool must have some scheduling flexibility, so the high schoolers will have the opportunity to see youngsters participating in a variety of activities. Finally, the preschool staff should be willing to learn what the high schoolers are studying in their classwork so they can complement that learning in the preschool placement.

What do the adolescents do at the field sites? They are expected to do everything the preschool staff does. Students interact with the youngsters on a personal level--tying shoes, putting on coats, helping with a special task, playing with a toy, teaching a skill, talking with a child. The adolescents also work with groups of children in daily art, game, music, and playground activities, as well as in planning and directing special parties and events for youngsters.

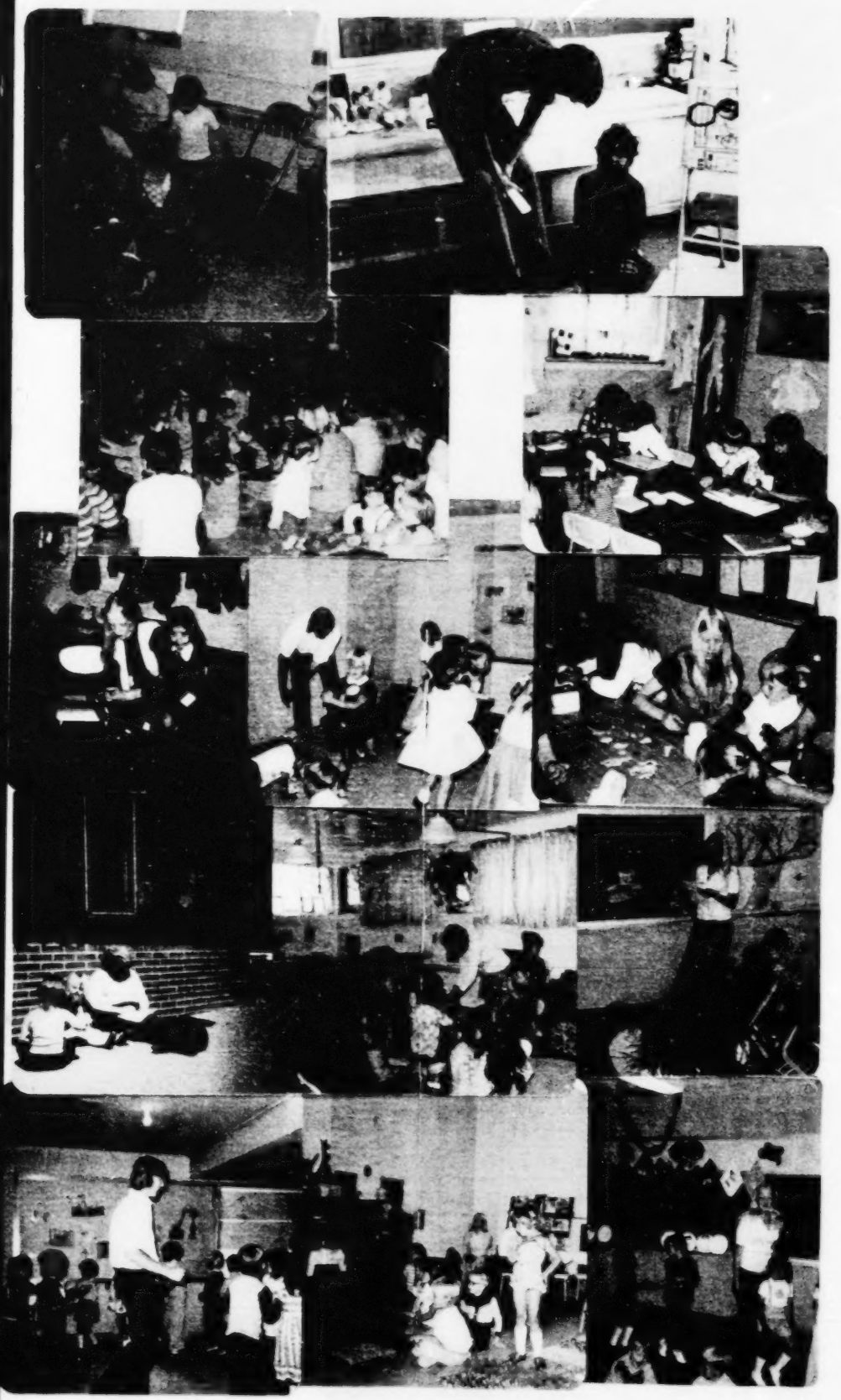
Eastin feels it is important for her students to plan and conduct a number of activities for both individual children and groups of youngsters. Students in her class must plan story, art, cooking, science, music, language arts, game play, and puppet activities during the year. Ranum students got some additional experience in directing children when the *Exploring Childhood* class conducted a half-day preschool in a Ranum classroom for three days.

Students in all three programs had the experience of conducting an individual case study of a child in their field placement. The adolescents chose the child they wished to study at the beginning of the term and paid special attention to that child's behavior and development during the year, recording their observations regularly. The adolescents were also encouraged to meet the youngster's family and to learn something about the child's life outside the school when possible.

Adolphson at Bear Creek High School has placed considerable emphasis on case studies. Students discussed their cases periodically during the year and attempted to find ways to help a child with a particular problem when their help seemed appropriate. For example, one student was studying a very shy youngster. The high schooler concentrated on helping the child integrate into the group; by the end of the year the student felt she had been successful in helping the youngster overcome her initial anxieties about group interaction. Case studies were written up in report form and presented to the class at the end of the term.

In addition to studying individual children, students were also encouraged to study the group dynamics of the preschool classes they observed. Many students were surprised to find so many subtle and overt social interactions among the young children. Pugh helped the students focus on the group relations in the classes they observed by teaching the use of a sociogram and having the adolescents plot interactions during some of their preschool sessions.

The three teachers all agree that the quality of students' overall experience in *Exploring Childhood* depends greatly on their field placements. For this reason the teachers maintain good communication with the preschool staffs; teachers schedule regular visits to the centers and set aside special times to meet with the preschool directors. Pugh holds some inservice training sessions for cooperating teachers. Periodically preschool staffs are asked to evaluate each student's work, and the teachers use these evaluations in assigning final grades.



Firsthand experience with young children makes Exploring Childhood come alive for adolescent students.

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SOLVING THE COMPLEXITIES

"Setting up a program like this is much more difficult than teaching a regular class. You need to have double periods so the students have enough time to get to and from the centers. You have to be certain students can make transportation arrangements. And of course, you've got to find convenient centers that have good programs and cooperative staffs. It all gets very complicated."

This evaluation by Eastin is supported by the other teachers. Adolphson adds, "Just starting the program is not enough; the students have to be continually monitored in the preschool placements to make certain they show up regularly and do what they are supposed to do."

Although there are special complexities and problems in implementing an *Exploring Childhood* program, participants--teachers, preschool staffs, students--all agree that it is worth the effort. The adolescent students are especially enthusiastic. Many say they like *Exploring Childhood* because they are learning something "practical," something they can use in later life.

The effect of the course varies from student to student. One young man is so intrigued with young children that he wants to become a child psychologist. Another student has quite a different reaction; she has decided she does not want to have children of her own. "I've learned I just don't have the temperament for it," she states firmly.

The high school teachers are pleased with the program because they see it as a true life preparation experience. They've seen students grow, not just in their knowledge of child development, but also in their perception of themselves and their families. Teachers report hearing students say they understand their own parents and siblings much better as a result of the course.

Teachers have also observed that underachieving students really blossom in the *Exploring Childhood* course. One student, who had been completely apathetic all through high school, became so involved in her case study child that she spent many hours searching for information which would enable her to help him solve his behavioral problems.

What about the children in the preschool centers? Have there been benefits for them? Preschool staff members and Ft. Benton elementary teachers believe the work done by the adolescents is quite beneficial to the youngsters. The kindergarten teacher from Ft. Benton describes a "warm feeling and relationship" between her kindergarteners and the *Exploring Childhood* students. Preschool directors feel their youngsters genuinely look forward to the arrival of the Bear Creek and Ranum students. "Our little boys especially love to have the male students play with them," says one director. "Many of our children come from fatherless families and these high school boys have helped compensate for their lack of male companionship."

INTO THE FUTURE

Ft. Benton, Ranum, and Bear Creek all plan to continue expanding their programs. Pugh plans to involve many more students in his program by teaching *Exploring Childhood* as a nine-week unit of his "Self-Awareness" class, a required course for all ninth graders.

Adolphson and Eastin are also making efforts to get more boys into their programs. In addition, these teachers would like to develop preschool facilities in their respective schools. The facilities they envision would be privately directed and financed but located within the high school complex to serve as a laboratory for the *Exploring Childhood* program. Teachers feel their programs would be considerably strengthened by easier access to preschool children.

Exploring Childhood is a many-faceted program, and schools are often puzzled about which department should assume responsibility for teaching the subject. Thomas Fitzgerald, regional coordinator for EDC, feels the course does not necessarily belong in any one department. Although most *Exploring Childhood* courses are now taught through home economics departments, Fitzgerald notes that social studies specialists are increasingly interested in the course as part of their curriculum.

No matter where *Exploring Childhood* is placed in the total school curriculum, it is important that the program not become an extension of another course. *Exploring Childhood* needs to be viewed as a dynamic learning experience in and of itself--an experience in which students simultaneously explore practical and theoretical aspects of child development. When taught as an integrated learning experience, *Exploring Childhood* becomes a true "learning for living" course.

ERIC DOCUMENTS

ED 092 535 - The Effects of Cross-Age Teaching Experiences in Language Achievement, Self Concept, and School Sentiment of Eleventh Graders Who Teach Language Arts to Fourth Graders. Final Report. By Pam Lewis and William C. Bruce. 23 pp. MF - $.75, HC - $1.50. This is a description of a study of the work of 60 11th-grade students who tutored 4th-grade students in language arts for nine weeks. Tutors were found to be a viable asset to the classroom and an important addition to the existing curriculum.

ED 090 404 - Child Development Curriculum Guide. Basic and Semester Units. Drafts. By Georgia Elam et al. 111 pp. MF - $1.75, HC - $5.40. This guide was developed as a result of parents, teachers, administrators, students, and special consultants listing what they considered to be the most crucial aspects of child care and development for today's youth.

ED 085 090 - Cross-Age Tutoring. John W. Hagen and Tamerra Moeller. 16 pp. MF - $.75, HC - $1.50. A cross-age tutoring program, conducted in an elementary school, is described. Aided by teachers and group leaders, 5th and 6th graders tutored 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders.

ED 084 022 - Education for Parenthood and the Schools. By W. Stanley Kruger. 23 pp. MF - $.75, HC - $1.50. School-related programs of the Education for Parenthood Project are described. The purpose of the project is to provide young people with knowledge and skills to enable them to be effective parents.